STUMPTOWN™

GREG RUCKA • MATTHEW SOUTHWORTH • RICO RENZI

The Case of the Baby in the Velvet Case

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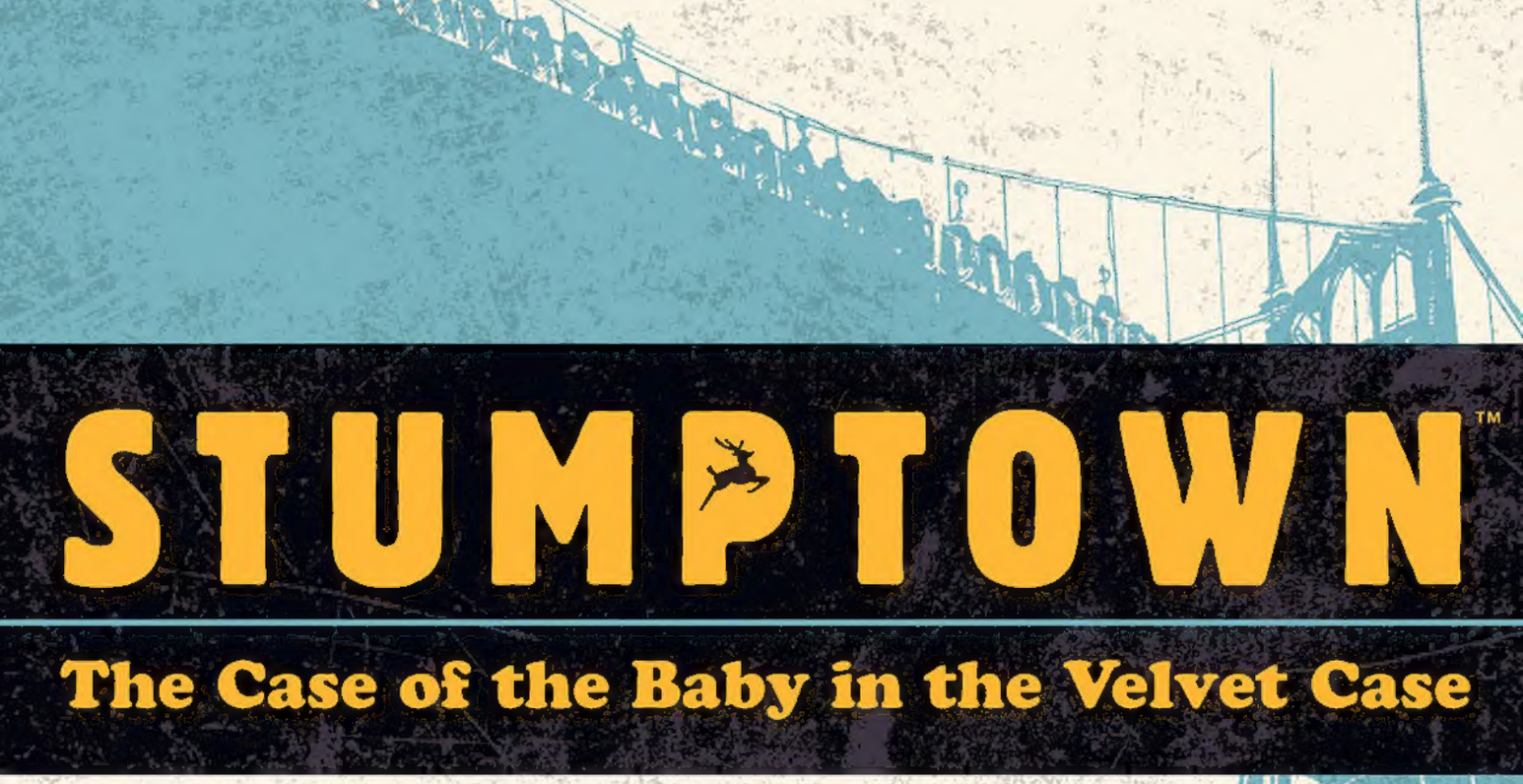

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The Case of the Baby in the Velvet Case

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the last time
that was the last time
I let you have me
I let you hold me
ECZAD
CRYSTAL
TONIGHT
TAILHOOK
W ZEE DEE OHHH
AND HERMAN AND
THE HERETICS
BALLROOM
that was the last time
the last time
I let you
burn me
burn me
burn me
the
last
time
tits
I let you
hold
meeee
I let you hold
meeee down

VANESSA! OUTSTAND--
BITE ME, GRAHAM.

EXIT
VAN, HOLD ON!
DAMMIT, HOLD ON!
BITE.
ME.

ANY IDEA WHAT *THAT'S* ABOUT?
DOES SHE NEED A *REASON?*
PUT IT LIKE THAT, NO.
YOU GOING TO THE *AFTER* PARTY?
I WAS THINKING OF GOING HOME . . .
. . . YOU KNOW, SLEEP IN MY OWN BED FOR THE *FIRST* TIME IN *SIX MONTHS.*
THANKS, FABRIZIO.
ALONE?
ALONE, *ALAS.*
EASY ENOUGH TO *FIX* THAT, MIM. JUST LEAN OUT THE *STAGE DOOR.*
YOU BEEN TAKING LESSONS FROM VAN, CLICK?
FUCK NO . . .
. . . I DON'T HAVE THE *SEXUAL STAMINA* . . .

BANG BANG BANG BANG

GO BY TRAIN UNION STATION

PARK
PAY TO PARK ALL HOURS
24 HOURS

BANG BANG BANG BANG BANGUNK

OW!

OWMOTHERFU--

EXCUSE ME?

STUMPTOWN INVESTIGATIONS?

MMFFM

SORRY?

YES! YES, STUMPTOWN INVESTIGATIONS, YES, CORRECT, SORRY--

--SORRY, STILL UNPACKING, JUST MOVED IN. WAS WORKING OUT OF MY HOME--

--JUST MOVED IN, DIDN'T EXPECT A CLIENT SO SOON, POTENTIAL CLIENT, I MEAN--

--DEX PARIOS, OWNER, PROPRIETOR, PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR. NICE TO MEET YOU.

HARRISON, DON HARRISON.

SO, WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU, MISTER HARRISON?

I NEED, AH . . . I'M FOREMAN ON A SITE UP IN SULLIVAN'S GULCH. PUTTING UP THE NEW CONDOS THERE.

THING IS, I, I MEAN, WE'VE BEEN, THERE'RE . . . SEE, SUPPLIES, THEY'RE GOING MISSING, AND I DON'T, I MEAN, I NEED . . . AH . . .

YOU NEED SOMEONE TO COME IN AND PUT A STOP TO IT. MAYBE FIND OUT WHO'S DOING IT.
YES. YES, THAT'S IT, THAT'S IT EXACTLY. EXACTLY.
YOU'VE REPORTED THE THEFTS TO THE POLICE?
I HAVE, BUT IT'S, IT'S LOW PRIORITY, RIGHT NOW, I THINK.
I'M NOT LOOKING FOR *RECOVERY*, JUST . . . I NEED IT TO *STOP*, YOU SEE?
SURE. WELL, I CAN HELP YOU WITH THAT, SET UP SURVEILLANCE ON THE SITE, EVEN COME ON AS PART OF THE *CREW*, IF YOU'D RATHER.
FOR THIS I'D TAKE FIVE HUNDRED AS A RETAINER, SAY THIRTY BUCKS AN HOUR AGAINST THAT. YOU COVER EXPENSES.
THAT'LL BE FINE.
I'LL JUST PUT YOU DOWN AS THE *CLIENT*, THEN? DONALD HARRISON?
NO, THE COMPANY SHOULD BE THE CLIENT . . .
. . . RAIN OR SHINE CONSTRUCTION . . .

. . .I'M WRITING THE CHECK ON THE BUSINESS ACCOUNT--
YEAH.
DON'T BOTHER.
I--
WHAT?
I'M SORRY TO HAVE WASTED YOUR TIME, MISTER HARRISON.
I CAN'T TAKE THE JOB.
IF YOU'D LIKE, I CAN RECOMMEND ONE OR TWO OTHER FIRMS IN TOWN THAT'D BE HAPPY TO HELP YOU.
MALCOLM CLARK AT VIGILANT IS A GOOD GUY, YOU CAN TELL HIM I SENT YOU.
IF THIS IS A MONEY THING, I MEAN, I'VE GOT ROOM TO NEGOTIATE.
IT'S NOT A MONEY THING. BELIEVE ME, I COULD USE THE JOB.
RAIN OR SHINE IS A HECTOR MARENCO BUSINESS.
I DON'T DO WORK FOR HECTOR MARENCO.

"WHAT IS IN THAT WORD, HONOR; WHAT IS THAT HONOR?"
"AIR."
"A TRIM RECKONING? WHO HATH IT?"
"HE THAT DIED O'WEDNESDAY."

HENRY THE FOURTH, PART ONE, RIGHT?
AH . . . YEAH.
FALSTAFF, END OF ACT FIVE, SCENE ONE.
SO . . . YOU JUST NORMALLY STAND AROUND YOUR OFFICE, QUOTING SHAKESPEARE?
ASSUMING THIS IS YOUR OFFICE?
IT'S MY OFFICE. YOU STICK AROUND, I'LL DO THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR NEXT.
YOU'RE MIRIAM BRACCA. TAILHOOK.
WOW, YOU REALLY ARE A DETECTIVE. MOST PEOPLE DON'T RECOGNIZE ME.
MOSTLY, THEY RECOGNIZE VAN.
I CHEATED. TRACY HOFFMAN'S A FRIEND OF MINE.
WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU, MISS BRACCA?
SOMEONE STOLE MY BABY.

"I OWN . . . I OWN A FUCKTON OF GUITARS, UNDERSTAND ME. I THINK ALL OF US DO, ALL OF US WHO PLAY THEM, I MEAN. IT'S LIKE . . . NOT FETISH, NOT *COLLECTING*, BUT . .

" . . . THEY'RE *ART*, AND THEY'RE THE ART BY WHICH WE MAKE *ART*, IF THAT MAKES SENSE? CAPITAL 'A' *ART*.

Rolling Stone

The Fraud at the Heart of the Mortgage Meltdown

EMINEM The Road Back From Hell

TAILHOOK The Making of a Masterpiece

NOVEMBER 2009

GuitarPlayer

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"I'VE GOT A '52 FENDER BROADCASTER, ORIGINAL FITTINGS, ANOTHER FENDER TELE THE LABEL GAVE ME WHEN *BLACK TAROT* WENT PLATINUM. I'VE GOT . . I'VE GOT A LOT OF GUITARS.

"BUT THIS ONE, THIS ONE'S MY *BABY*, YOU UNDERSTAND? THIS IS MY *TRUE LOVE*.

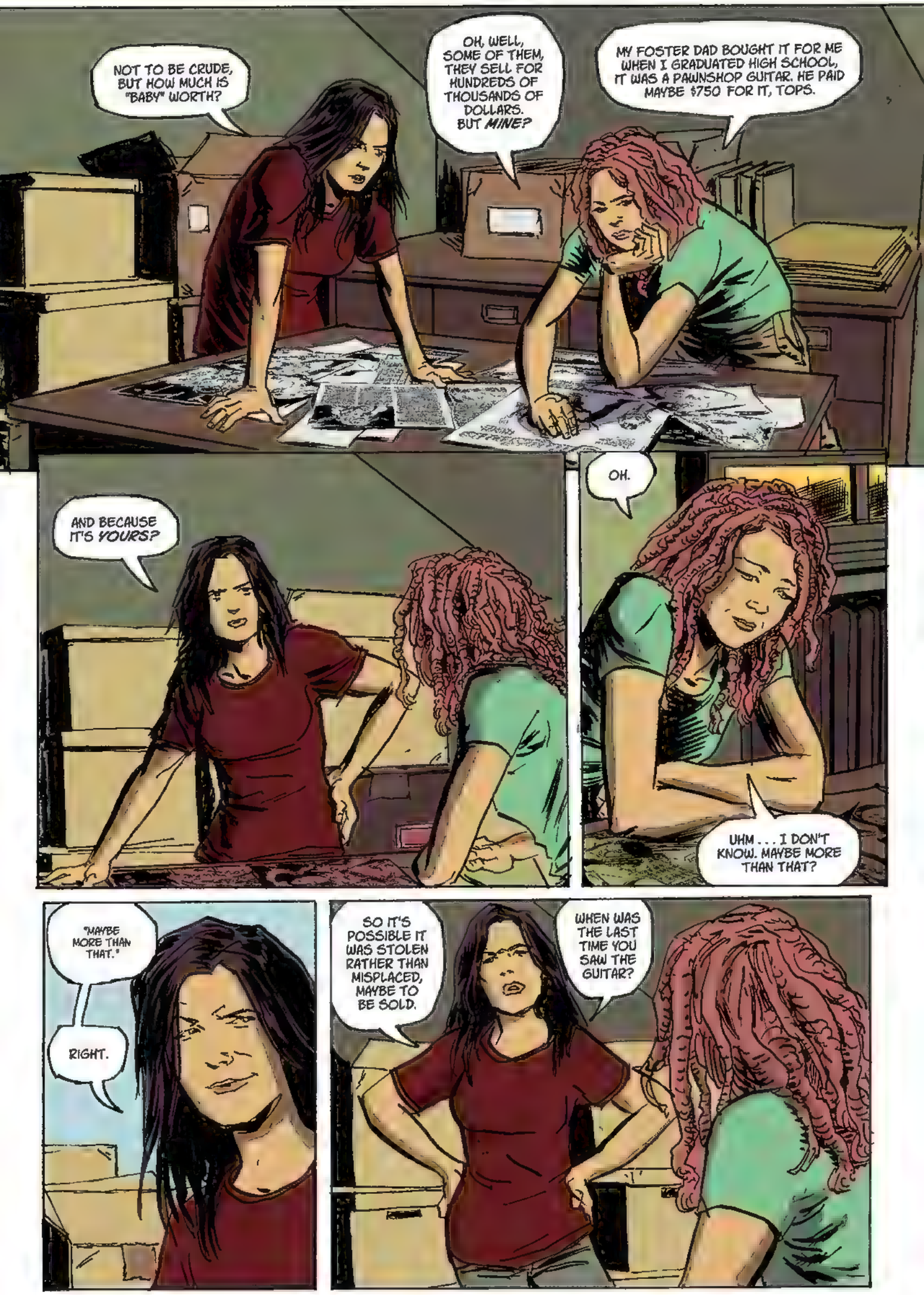
"ALWAYS FAITHFUL, ALWAYS STEADY, ALWAYS THERE FOR ME. ALWAYS ALIVE UNDER MY FINGERS, ALWAYS READY TO SING. SO FULL OF SONGS, I CAN'T--I CAN'T *EXPLAIN* IT, IT'S JUST . . . THERE ARE SO MANY *SONGS* STILL IN HER

"SHE'S A 1977 GIBSON LES PAUL, AND SHE'S *PERFECT*. ORIGINAL FITTINGS, FINGERBOARD TO THE PAF HUMBUCKERS, EVEN THE TAILPIECE AND THE BRIDGE.

"ONLY THING I DID TO IT WAS SHAVE AND SAND THE BACK OF THE NECK, JUST SO MY HAND WOULDN'T STICK TO THE LACQUER WHEN I PLAYED

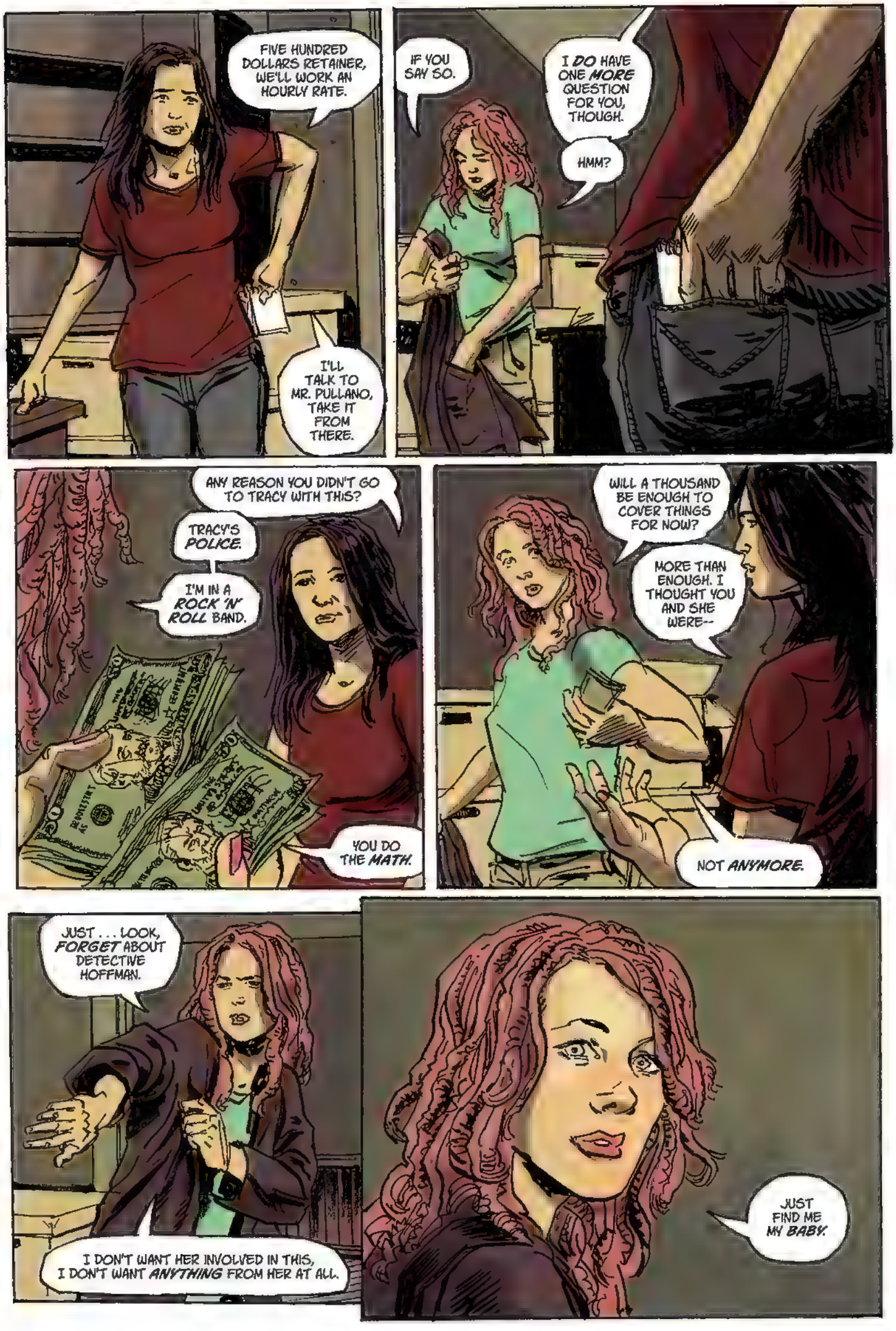
"SHE'S BEAUTIFUL.

"AND NOW SHE'S *GONE*."


NOT TO BE CRUDE, BUT HOW MUCH IS "BABY" WORTH?
OH, WELL, SOME OF THEM, THEY SELL FOR HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS. BUT *MINE*?
MY FOSTER DAD BOUGHT IT FOR ME WHEN I GRADUATED HIGH SCHOOL, IT WAS A PAWNSHOP GUITAR. HE PAID MAYBE $750 FOR IT, TOPS.
AND BECAUSE IT'S *YOURS*?
OH.
UHM . . . I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE MORE THAN THAT?
"MAYBE MORE THAN THAT."
RIGHT.
SO IT'S POSSIBLE IT WAS STOLEN RATHER THAN MISPLACED, MAYBE TO BE SOLD.
WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAW THE GUITAR?

NIGHT BEFORE LAST. WE CLOSED OUT THE LATEST TOUR AT THE CRYSTAL BALLROOM.
FIFTY CITIES, ENDED UP BACK HOME.
WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR GUITARS AFTER A SHOW?
THE ROADIES DO THE TAKEDOWN, JASON TAKES CARE OF CLICK'S KIT, FABRIZIO HANDLES MY GUITARS.
FABRIZIO?
FABRIZIO PULLANO, MY GUITAR TECH.
HE TAKES EACH GUITAR, WIPES THEM DOWN, RESTRINGS THEM, WORKS THE HARDWARE, TUNES THEM. LIKE THAT.
YOU DON'T DO THAT YOURSELF?
I CAN, BUT . . . FABRIZIO'S SO MUCH BETTER AT IT THAN I AM. I PLAY BETTER BECAUSE OF HIM.
AND THEN?
DEPENDS. ON THE ROAD, THEY GET PACKED AND SHIPPED WITH THE REST OF THE GEAR TO THE NEXT GIG.
BUT I'M HOME, SO ALL MY GUITARS GOT DELIVERED TO MY HOUSE YESTERDAY AFTERNOON. EXCEPT BABY.

AND YOU ALREADY TALKED TO FABRIZIO?
RIGHT AWAY. HE WAS *REALLY* UPSET.
HE TOLD ME HE'D PACKED IT UP WITH THE REST OF THE GUITARS.
YOU SOUND *SURPRISED.*
DO I? I DON'T *MEAN* TO.
FABRIZIO LOVES THOSE GUITARS EVEN MORE THAN *I* DO, MS. PARIOS. AND BEFORE YOU THINK THAT MAKES HIM A *SUSPECT*, IT *DOESN'T.*
IT MAKES HIM A *BRILLIANT* GUITAR TECH.
DEX.
CALL ME DEX.
MIM.
THAT'S PROBABLY ENOUGH TO GET *STARTED.*
IT IS? DON'T YOU WANT TO TALK TERMS? A CONTRACT?


FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS RETAINER, WE'LL WORK AN HOURLY RATE.
I'LL TALK TO MR. PULLANO, TAKE IT FROM THERE.
IF YOU SAY SO.
I DO HAVE ONE MORE QUESTION FOR YOU, THOUGH.
HMM?
ANY REASON YOU DIDN'T GO TO TRACY WITH THIS?
TRACY'S POLICE.
I'M IN A ROCK 'N' ROLL BAND.
YOU DO THE MATH.
WILL A THOUSAND BE ENOUGH TO COVER THINGS FOR NOW?
MORE THAN ENOUGH. I THOUGHT YOU AND SHE WERE--
NOT ANYMORE.
JUST . . . LOOK, FORGET ABOUT DETECTIVE HOFFMAN.
I DON'T WANT HER INVOLVED IN THIS, I DON'T WANT ANYTHING FROM HER AT ALL.
JUST FIND ME MY BABY.

THERE SHE IS. . .
WHO'S THAT WITH HER?
NO IDEA, BUT IT MAKES A GOOD PHOTO.
WHICH DO YOU WANT?
I'LL TAKE THE NEW GIRL . . .
. . . YOU STICK WITH THE ROCK STAR.
KEEP IN TOUCH.
YEAH.
YOU TOO.

--SAID WHERE IS IT?
STOP IT!! LEAVE HIM ALONE!!
SHUT THAT BITCH UP!
GED YUR HANDS UFF--
HE'S GONNA DO MORE THAN JUST HOLD HER, YOU DON'T START TALKING, YOU FUCKING DAGO!

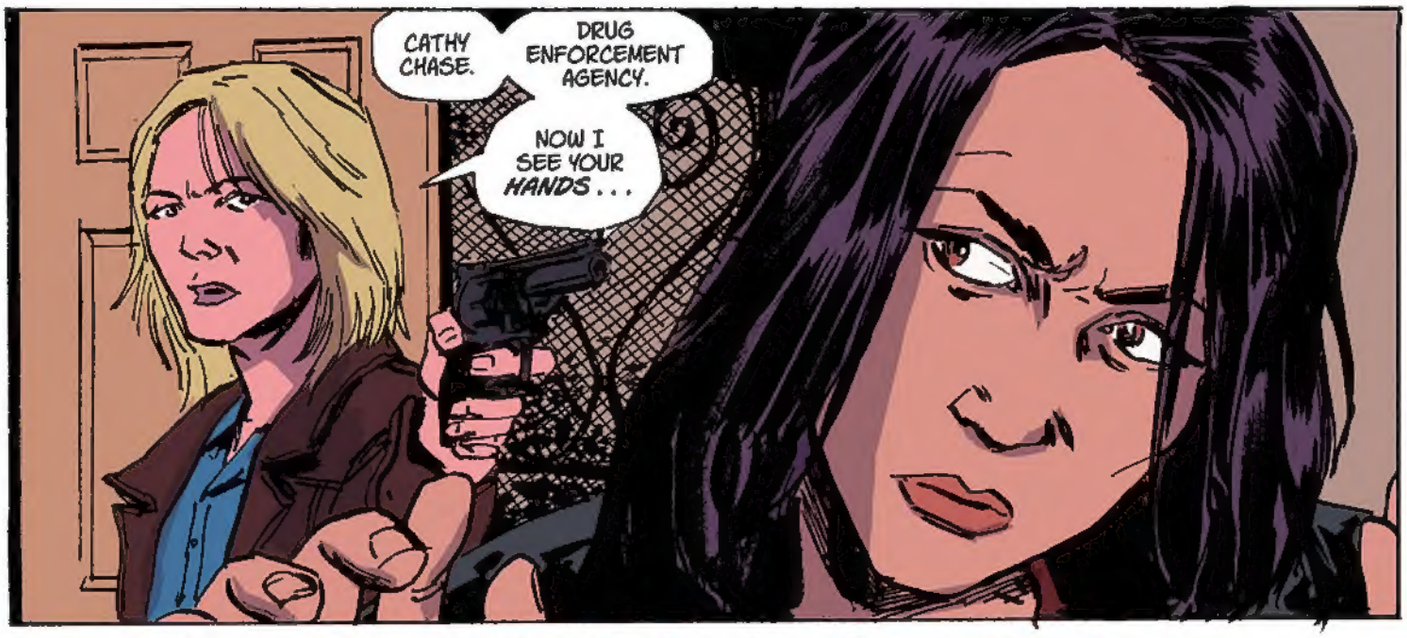
WHERE IS IT? WHERE'S THE GUITAR?!?
I DUN KNOW! I DUN KNOW!!!
WRONG ANSWER--
THREE MINUTES.
ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY SECONDS.
WELL, ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY, NOW, PROBABLY.
BITCH, YOU WALKED INTO THE WRONG HOUSE.
ONE FORTY, MAYBE.

THE FUCK IS SHE *TALKING* ABOUT, BRAD?
GOD *DAMMIT*--
--DON'T *USE* MY FUCKING *NAME!*
TWO MINUTES.
SHUT THE *FUCK* UP!
SHUT THE FUCK *UP* OR I CUT YOU A *NEW* SLIT, BITCH!
ONE-TEN.
WHAT DOES THAT *MEAN!?!?*
IT'S THE SECONDS YOU HAVE LEFT BEFORE EVERY *COP* IN SOUTHEAST PORTLAND IS CRAWLING UP YOUR *ASS* IN RESPONSE TO THIS LITTLE *HOME INVASION* OF YOURS.
AVERAGE *RESPONSE* TIME IN THIS PART OF TOWN IS ABOUT *THREE* MINUTES . . .

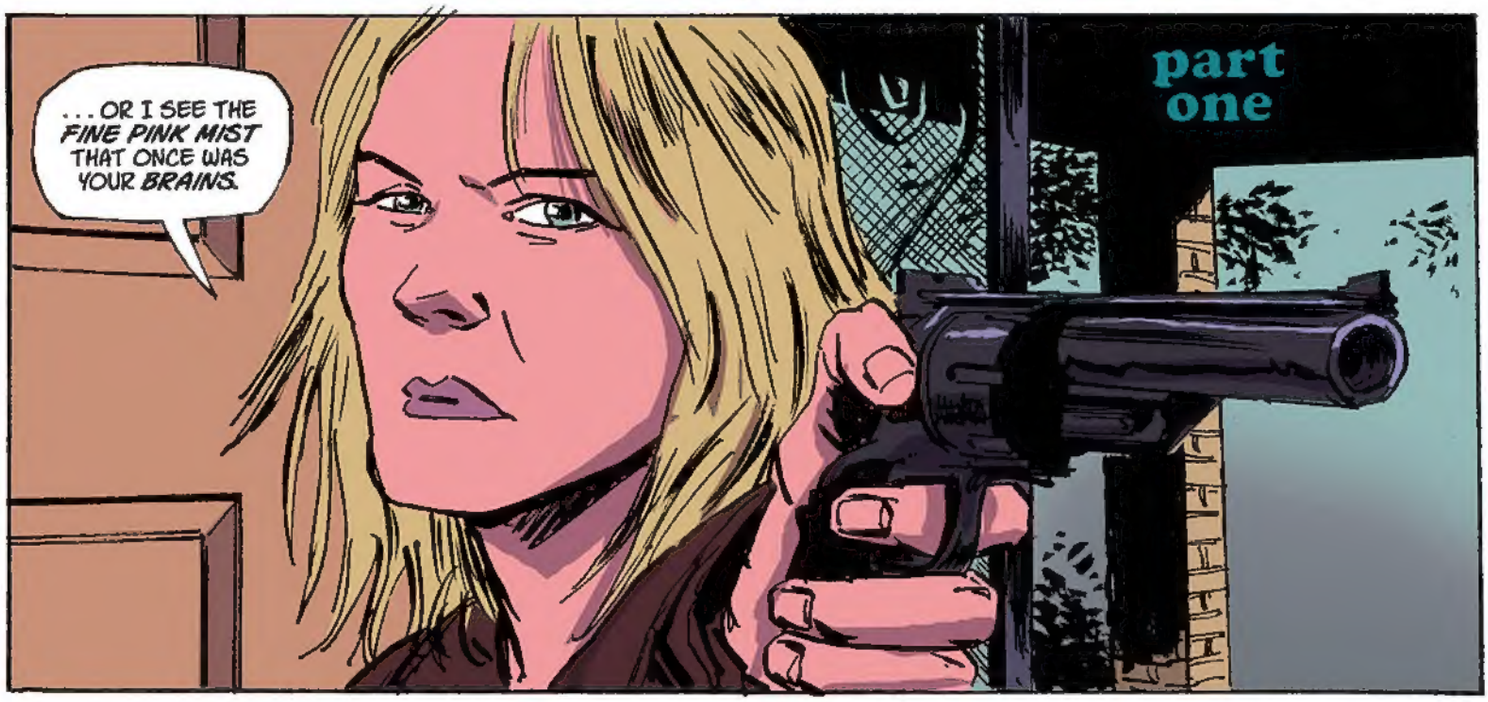
. . . WHICH MEANS YOU'VE GOT ABOUT *HALF* THAT TIME LEFT TO *VANISH.*
StopWatch
00:01:29.6
Lap
Stop
SAMSUNG
BRAD! WE GOTTA--
SHUT *UP!*
YOU . . . YOU'RE FULL OF *SHIT.*
TAKE THE TIME TO *STAB* ME AND YOU'LL FIND *OUT.*
BRAAAAD--
GET TO THE *TRUCK--*

--DEAL WITH THEM LATER...
...'SPECIALLY YOU, BITCH.
UH-OH! HEAR THAT?
THAT SOUNDS LIKE SIRENS!
BYE BYE.
SKINHEADS.
WHAT'RE YOU GONNA DO?

FABRIZIO PULLANO? I'M DEX PARIOS.
YOU TWO OKAY? ASIDE FROM THE BLOODY NOSE?
WE ARE NOT OKAY!
PEOPLE BARGING INTO OUR HOME, ATTACKING US!
AND YOU, MISS, YOU-- I WOULD THANK YOU TO LEAVE, RIGHT NOW!
SURE, I'LL DO THAT. I JUST HAD A QUESTION OR TWO.
THOSE GUYS, THEY WERE LOOKING FOR THE BABY?
THE BABY? WHAT BABY?
DE GUIDAR. MIM CALLZ ID HUR 'BAYBEE'.
DEY BROKE MA NODE.
YEAH, MIM HIRED ME TO FIND IT.
AND I THINK THEY DID. MRS PULLANO? YOU MIGHT WANT TO GET SOME ICE FOR YOUR HUSBAND--
HANDS.
OH FOR THE LOVE OF--



the case of the baby in the velvet case



WHY P.I.? PART ONE WESTWARD HO!

I fell in love with the private investigator as an idea, best as I can figure, because Jim Rockford had an answering machine, and most of the time the messages that were left for him made me laugh out loud. I was, I think, all of eleven at the time.

Prior to *The Rockford Files*, I'd dabbled in the genre, but without any true connection, mostly because prior to Jimbo, I didn't really understand the genre as it existed. I'd read *Encyclopedia Brown* and *The Great Brain*, but the former were less mysteries than prose-form logic problems, and the *Great Brain* books were a form unto themselves. I'd been handed the *Hardy Boys*, and they'd bored me to fucking tears.

So my first PI was Jim Rockford, and that was television. If you came of age in the 70s and 80s, you experienced a rare largesse in terms of the genre. Private Eyes were everywhere. They were on the three networks almost every night of the week, and they were exploding off shelves in bookstores, led in no small part to the success of Robert B. Parker's *Spenser* series, which, in turn, was helped by the moderate success of the television show. I went from *The Rockford Files* to *Simon & Simon* to *Magnum, PI*, and if the words "Ivan? Did you see the sunrise?" give you a chill, then we're speaking the same language.

Then my mother gave me *Murder on the Yellow Brick Road* by the late MWA Grandmaster Stuart Kaminsky, and I realized what I was seeing on the magic box was born from words on a page, and I was off to the races. I spent most of my high school years alternating between reading comics, sci-fi, fantasy, and PI novels. I hit college with every Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammet and Ross MacDonald and Donald Westlake I owned packed in my boxes, much to the chagrin of my parents, who had to pay to ship them to me. I discovered Lawrence Block, and, later, Andrew Vachss.

I hadn't yet figured out that I was a writer myself at this time, mind you. I was writing all the time, but somehow I was missing the obvious. I thought maybe I'd go into theatre, or academia, and it was that latter that kept me reading in the genre, and examining the genre, and trying to understand what makes it tick, why it mattered, and why, to me, it was a distinctly American genre.

Matthew gave over the backmatter of the first *Stumptown* case to an analysis of his process, his work, how he does what he does. I've talked at length about that stuff, and if you want to read it, I'll direct you to the webcomic that I've been doing with Rick Burchett and Eric Newsom, *Lady Sabre & The Pirates of the Ineffable Aether*. There's a section called Dispatches at the site, and you'll find my thoughts under the series "Process."

But James Lucas Jones has made the fundamental mistake of giving me these pages to talk about whatever I want, and — lucky you — I'm going to talk about the private investigator, the genre, and why I think the PI Story is as American as baseball, apple pie, and jazz.

Whoa, wait, smart guy. What about Sherlock Holmes? Huh? Maybe not strictly a PI, but definitely not American.

Correct, yes. But while Doyle may have been inspired by Doctor Joseph Bell, his literary influence was undoubtably Edgar Alan Poe, a man who, in so many ways, is the progenitor of modern American literature. Poe gave us Dupin, and while Dupin was Parisien... well, you can take the character out of 19th century America, but you can't take the American out of Rue Morgue, so to speak.

That notwithstanding, Dupin isn't the grandfather, here. The grandfather is the cowboy. The grandfather is the lone gunman bringing law to the lawless range. The modern private investigator has her roots in the Old West, where individuality and the individual's code were, at least in dramatic form, given pride of place as the most noble of traits.

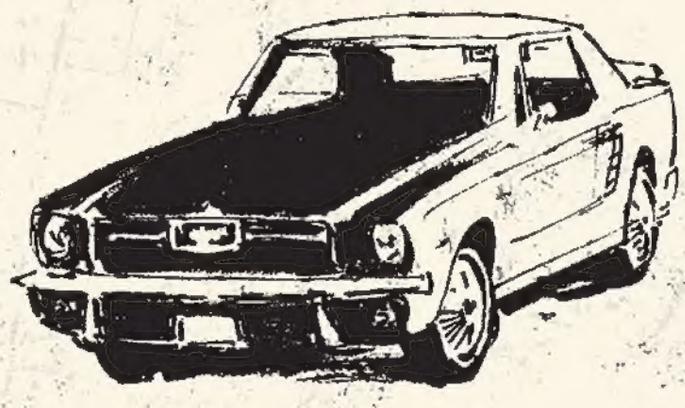
It's no surprise that, when the West was finally Won and there wasn't any more of it to be had, our first 20th Century PIs showed up in California. The cowboy had run out of real estate, had found himself city—bound, and had to recast himself. Spade and Archer in San Francisco, Philip Marlowe in Los Angeles, and it's no coincidence — to me, at least — that's where you found Rockford. If you're inclined to beat the symbology on the head, I'd point out that Magnum eked west so much he almost ended up Far East with Hawai'i.

You may have noticed that *Stumptown* is set in the Pacific Northwest. That's by design. (As far as that goes, I've got notes for a case that'll sends Dex into eastern Oregon, the high desert. Where there are rodeos. And cowboys. Picture Dex on horseback with a six-gun. You know it's coming.)

Right, so that's phase one, so to speak, the detective born out of the cowboy, in turn born of the Western Expansion. The — and this is crucial — lone figure, bound by her sense of honor, her sense of right and wrong, and her inability (or unwillingness) to stand aside and allow injustice to pass. Who does this alone.

Why alone?

That's for next time.



GREG RUCKA, PORTLAND, OREGON

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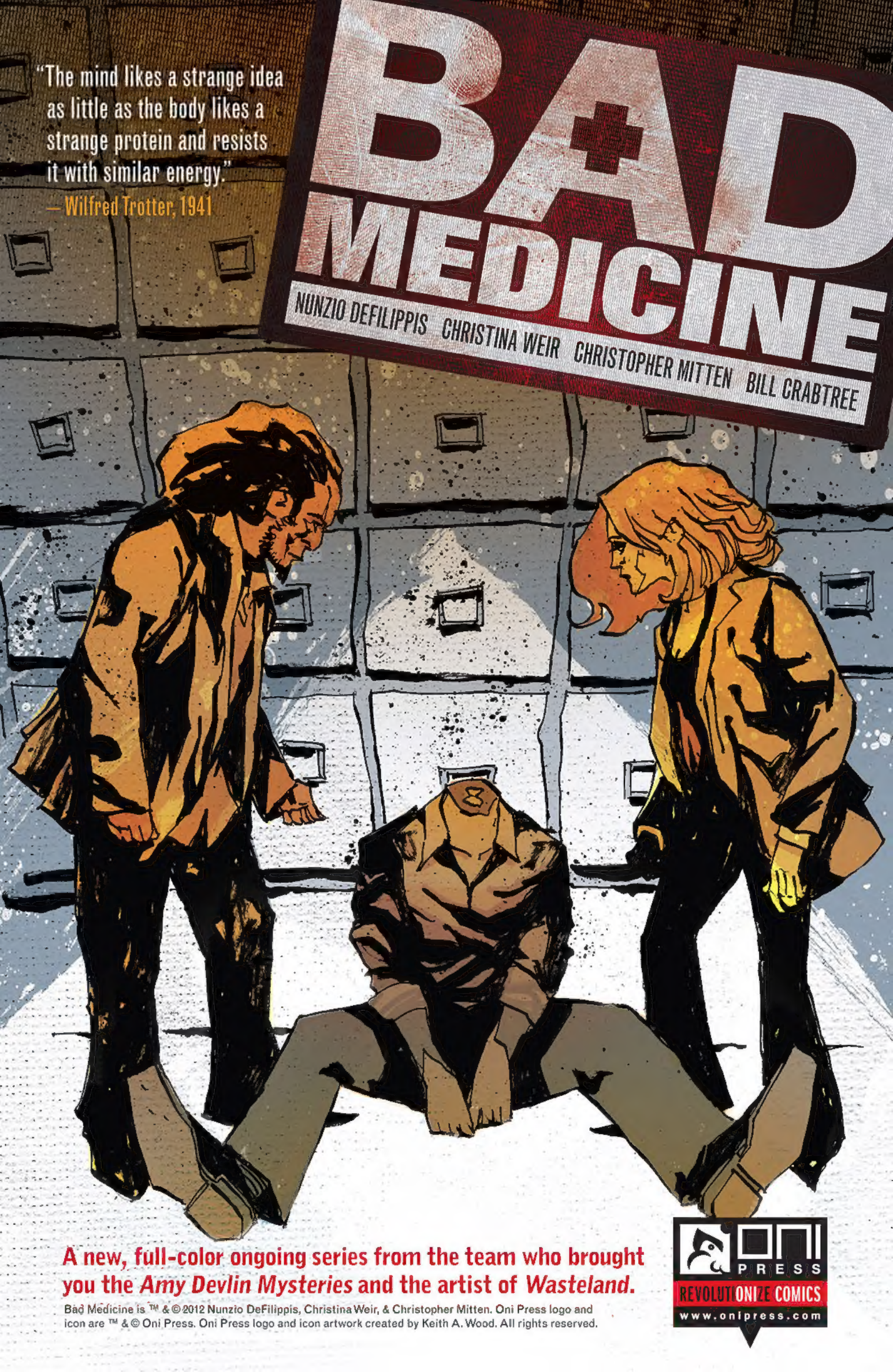
"The mind likes a strange idea as little as the body likes a strange protein and resists it with similar energy."
— Wilfred Trotter, 1941
BAD MEDICINE
NUNZIO DEFILIPPIS CHRISTINA WEIR CHRISTOPHER MITTEN BILL CRABTREE
A new, full-color ongoing series from the team who brought you the *Amy Devlin Mysteries* and the artist of *Wasteland*.
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